

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of claims:**

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method of case-hardening a stainless article by means of gas including carbon and/or nitrogen, whereby carbon and/or nitrogen atoms diffuse through the surface of the article, the case-hardening is carried out below a temperature at which carbides and/or nitrides are produced, the method including activating the surface of the article, applying a top layer on the activated surface to prevent repassivation, the top layer includes metal which is catalytic to the decomposition of the gas, [characterised] characterized in that the metal is one or more of the metals Ni, Ru, Co or Pd.

Claim 2 (currently amended): A method according to claim 1, wherein the case-hardening is a nitriding process which is carried out with a nitrogen-containing gas below a temperature at which nitrides are produced [, preferably below approximately 450°C].

Claim 3 (currently presented): A method according to claim 1, wherein the case-hardening is carburizing with a carbon-containing gas [, preferably CO].

Claim 4 (currently amended): A method according to claim 3, wherein carburizing is carried out below a temperature at which carbides are produced [ , preferably below approximately 550°C, more preferably below approximately 510°C].

Claim 5 (currently amended): A method according to [any of the preceding claims] claim 1, wherein the top layer is a nickel layer.

Claim 6 (currently amended): A method according to claim 5, wherein the maximum average thickness of the nickel layers is 300 [nanometer, preferably 200 nanometer] nanometers.

Claim 7 (currently amended): A method according to claim [5 or] 6, wherein the nickel layer is applied by a chemical or electrolytical plating process [ , e.g. by electro-plating in a Wood's nickel bath].

Claim 8 (amended): A method according to [any of the preceding claims] claim 1, wherein the article is of austenitic stainless steel.

Claim 9 (amended): A method according to [to any of the preceding claims] claim 1, wherein the catalytic metal layer is only applied to part of the surface of the stainless steel article.

Claim 10 (new): A method according to claim 2, wherein the temperature is below 450°C.

Claim 11 (new): A method according to claim 3, wherein the gas is CO.

Claim 12 (new): A method according to claim 4, wherein the temperature is below 550°C.

Claim 13 (new): A method according to claim 4, wherein the temperature is below 510°C.

Claim 14 (new): A method according to claim 6, wherein the thickness is 200 nanometers.

Claim 15 (new): A method according to claim 7, wherein the nickel layer is applied by a Wood's nickel bath.

Claim 16 (new): A method according to claim 2, wherein the top layer is a nickel layer.

Claim 17 (new): A method according to claim 3, wherein the top layer is a nickel layer.

Claim 18 (new): A method according to claim 6, wherein the nickel layer is applied by a chemical or electrolytical plating process.

Claim 19 (new): A method according to claim 2, wherein the article is of austenitic stainless steel.

Claim 20 (amended): A method according to claim 2, wherein the catalytic metal layer is only applied to part of the surface of the stainless steel article.